

**Remarks by the Honorable Sean O’Keefe
NASA Administrator
Visit to NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory
Von Karman Auditorium
Pasadena, California
January 3, 2005**

Thank you Charles (Dr. Charles Elachi) for that gracious introduction. It's great to be back at JPL on this very special historic occasion. We're back--and we're still on Mars.

Let me just say at the outset that one of the reasons why I was so much looking forward to this visit, was the chance I'd get the opportunity to see the JPL float from the Tournament of Roses parade.

I understand that thanks to our friends at Cal Tech, this is the first time in many years that JPL's magnificent achievements have been highlighted in the parade.

Before I leave here, I plan to hear Dr. Elachi's assurance that JPL will have an equally impressive entry when Louisiana State University plays in the Rose Bowl game next year!

Well it's a real pleasure to be here in the auditorium named after JPL's visionary co-founding leader to salute the entire JPL team for a tremendous year of accomplishment.

We'll be hearing in a few moments from Jim Erickson, Steve Squyres and Firouz Naderi about the extraordinary accomplishments of our twin Mars Exploration Rovers, Spirit and Opportunity, and about the promising future of Mars Exploration as we move forward with our nation's Vision for Space Exploration.

Let me add my own two cents about our Mars exploration activities. What the Mars Exploration team has done in the last 12 months is nothing short of remarkable.

The ongoing missions of the Mars exploration rovers, Spirit and Opportunity are simply incredible. We're still getting an impressive scientific return from these two robotic pathfinders many months beyond what we thought possible. But in a larger sense, we've learned when we reach out within our own solar system and ask profound questions, we're likely to receive some very profound answers.

Opportunity's discovery that Mars once had large amounts of surface water is, indeed, a profound finding. And what that tells us is the climate, the atmosphere, of our neighboring planet was once dramatically different, and perhaps conducive to life.

Understanding why that changed may well provide a whole new perspective of our own place in the solar system, in this galaxy, and indeed in this broader universe.

It's a tremendous tribute to the dedication and perseverance of our entire Mars Exploration team that Science magazine has chosen the discoveries of the Mars Exploration Rover mission as the scientific breakthrough of the year. The Editors of Science gave this distinction in their words for the Rover's "profound implications for society and the advancement of science." That's high praise indeed.

Of course one year ago, we had no assurances that everything would go according to plan. On that Saturday night when we were gathered here, you could've cut the tension with a knife. When we finally got the signal that Spirit had safely landed in the ancient lakebed of Gusev Crater, the joyful celebration here did so much to lift the spirit of our

citizens and of people around the globe. And it gave a boost to all of us at NASA when we needed it most!

By the way, I still have the champagne bottle from when we celebrated Spirit's landing on display in my office. It is a memento of one of the most fulfilling days I've ever had in public service.

Spirit's successful landing as well as the fantastic work of the orbiting Mars Global Surveyor helped to set the table very well for President Bush's confident announcement 11 days later of a bold vision for human and robotic exploration throughout the Solar System.

As the President said that day, "the risk takers and visionaries of this agency have expanded human knowledge, have revolutionized our understanding of the universe, and produced technological advances that have benefited all of humanity."

You will soon hear about the next exploration adventures to come on the red planet, with a new generation of orbiters and rovers, beginning with the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter next year. But we should not forget JPL's other contributions to exploration of our home planet and the wonderful worlds, stars and galaxies around us.

At this very moment the Spitzer Space Telescope, a little over a year in operation, the most recent addition to NASA's Mt. Rushmore of great observatories, is peering behind dust clouds in the deepest regions of space to view areas where new stars are forming, perhaps along with new planets.

Closer to home, in 11 days the Huygens probe will descend into the atmosphere of Saturn's mysterious moon Titan, a moon whose atmosphere may hold the secrets to Earth's early atmosphere from which life itself sprung forth billions of years ago.

We certainly look forward to some fantastic science results when this event happens. And I congratulate Bob Mitchell and his entire Cassini project team for their great success on this bold mission to the ringed planet.

Of course just nine days from now we hope to launch from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station the Deep Impact mission, the first to explore a comet's interior by using a spacecraft to create a crater, allowing us to look deep inside one of nature's most compelling objects.

When you add to this impressive list the work of Earth observing satellites like Aura, which is providing the first daily, direct global measurements of low-level ozone and other pollutants affecting air quality, the return by the Genesis spacecraft of precious particles from the solar wind, and the capture by the Stardust probe of ancient material from the comet Wild-2, I can say with great

confidence that the spirit of exploration and discovery has never been more vibrant at NASA than right here, right now.

It has indeed been an honor and a privilege for me to lead the NASA team these past three years. And as you can all see, I'm very proud of our colleagues here at JPL and throughout this agency who really do have the stuff that dreams are made of.

To Charles and your entire team, God bless each and every one of you as you continue to reach beyond the planets, the stars and sail into the new worlds of the 21st century. Thank you very much.